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ABSTRACT

Suggested is a program in which a professor of education and an elementary school teacher would work as a team for their mutual benefit, the former suggesting theories and conducting demonstration lessons, the latter implementing and modifying theories in the classroom, with both participating in joint evaluation. Provided are five sample innovations (out of 15 currently being used in such a program), each of which includes a theory, suggestions by the professor for classroom activities to test the theory, and accounts of teacher implementation of the suggestions. Some of the theories are: (1) "Children learn best when they feel accepted, loved and needed in the classroom" (This resulted in children writing about class members as the Personality of the Week.) (2) "Children learn best when they are involved in the selection of what they are to learn and can pace their own learning" (Students selected their own spelling words and contracted to learn a given number in a week.) and (3) "Children learn more when they evaluate their own performance than they do when the teacher evaluates it" (Students evaluated their independent work both in terms of effort and result.) (Appendices of individual student achievement, as well as professor, teacher and student evaluations of the project are included.) (MF)

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Experimental Programs in an Elementary School Classroom

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Professors obtain ideas from a variety of sources. Research journal articles, books, students, and school visitations are common sources of ideas for educational innovation. However, the charge is often made that professors dwell too much on theory which is either too difficult to implement or is not practical. The complaint usually ends with a suggestion that the professor return to the classroom for a year to see how it really is. The suggestion of a return to the classroom has much to offer - but the reality of the situation is that they do nbt. The excuse usually offered is that the professors job demands constant attention what with advising, committee work, research writing, projects, etc.

But theory does run into difficulty when attempts are made at implementation. The suggested theory may be impractical. The suggested theory may run into difficulty when attempted over a long period of time or a given theory may be in need of modification for implementation.

The purpose of this paper is to present a way out of the dilemma. A way which is both practical and desirable. A way which benefits all involved, i.e., the professor, the teacher implementers, and the children involved.

One Solution

Identify a school in which a teacher or two are willing to work with you to implement your theories of education. The professor works in that school one morning a week - helping to implement his theories, evaluating their results, adjusting the implementation, and re-evaluating.

Planning time is needed to meet with the teachers to work out the implementation scheme and to acquaint them with the theory. Bi-weekly conferences outside of school hours can be arranged to accomplish the necessary team effort.

As theories are placed into action, the professor can conduct demonstration lessons, set controls for data collection, assist the teacher with explanations for parents and school officials, assist with long term adjustments, and be responsible for evaluation. The teacher assumes the basic responsibility for the day-to-day work with children. He makes minor adjustments, suggests modifications, and assists with evaluation and planning.

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In Practice

We are currently implementing a program following the ideas mentioned above. We have selected five innovations, from our list of fifteen, for examples of how the system works.

1. The Theory: Children learn best when they feel accepted, loved, and needed in the classroom.

   Professor Suggestions: Feature one child a week as the Personality of the Week. Place a picture of him in a designated spot in the classroom. Have other children write short statements about what they like best about the child.

   Teacher's Implementation: Set aside bulletin board space in the room. Select one child a week whose picture I post on Monday. Cards or pieces of paper are available at the back of the room for writing, and pins for each child to attach his statement. The first child was so excited that by 12:00, while I was gone for lunch, he removed all the cards about him and had packed them up to take home and show his mother. The second child insisted his mother return to school at 5:00 to see it. It has definitely encouraged each child to look for positive attributes in others and to feel good about himself.

2. The Theory: Children learn best when they are involved in the selection of what they are to learn and can pace their own learning.

   Professor's Suggestion: Have the children in the room select their own spelling words from the reading and writing they are doing in other areas of the curriculum. Then let them contract with you for how many words they think they can learn in a given week.

   Teacher's Implementation: There is one class list to which children add words of their interest. The list is developed from Monday through Friday. On the following Monday, the practice test is given in order to determine which words on the list may already be in the child's spelling vocabulary. Each child then picks (possibly with some guidance from the teacher) the number of words he would like to learn from the ones he got wrong. This is done to help children feel more involved in the hopes they will also become more enthusiastic. We also hope it will help children realize their own potential and strive to reach it. After the child has selected the words which he will

learn during the week , the second step for him is to identify a method or methods by which he will study these words. Initially the children develop a list of "different ways to study a word", i.e., write words in sentence, trace. After sufficient time has been given to ensure that the children are familiar with the various techniques and are able to utilize each to their advantage, the children select the method(s) which they will use while learning their words. A record is kept by the children of which method(s) they used during the week. At the end of the week this enables the teacher and the child to determine whether or not the method(s) used were helpful to the child. See Appendix B. With the possible exception of one child, I can honestly say I have not noticed any feelings of anxiety or frustration due to either 1) failure or 2) boredom. There is no failure unless the child doesn't try - and to date, after two years this has not occurred.

3. The Theory: Children learn best if they can have a choice in selecting with whom they work.

   Professor's Suggestion: Assign children to reading groups if you wish, but allow them to read in any other group that they choose. In other words, poor readers can choose to read in fast reading groups as well as their own.

   Teacher's Implementation: I have established two days a week for open groups, two for closed groups and one for individual reading. I modified the professor's suggestion for open groups everyday because 1) I wanted to introduce the children gradually to the change so I could be sure they used the idea to advantage and 2) it gave me an opportunity to concentrate on the children with similar skill needs and 3) I felt they might look forward to the opportunity if it wasn't routine. A problem I had in implementing the open groups was that children in the lower groups were anxious to read in groups when the material was too difficulty. Since I have restricted my oral reading to just finding a passage to prove an idea - I wasn't sure what to do. The professor suggested pairing the slower readers with a "good" reader who would read outloud. As more children began to visit and paired reading became more prevalent, the children began to feel more comfortable and began to look forward to the opportunity to visit another group.

4. The Theory: Children learn best when instruction is diagnostic. Commercially prepared materials are not suitable for teaching skills in reading. The skills a child needs may or may not be in the skills section of the manual.

   Professor's Suggestion: Assess children's skills strengths and weaknesses early in the school year. Then use skill grouping designed to meet the child's strengths and weaknesses.....these skill groups need not relate to reading level.

Teacher's Implementation: At the start of this school year, the professor and I administered the Botel Word Opposites Test and the Botel Phonics Test to my class. I checked and analyzed each child and we drew up a profile chart of skill areas. For children who showed to be "poor" in several areas we gave them an auditory perception test to determine if their problem could be in lack of ability to hear sounds correctly. This showed that possibly two children could have this difficulty. Meanwhile, skill groups were established in the other areas of strengths and weaknesses and a general review was given for the areas where the children showed a "fair" response. The professor suggested activities which he felt might aid the children in these groups. At the end of eight weeks, the children were retested in order to see areas of adequate progress and poor progress. See Appendix A. This was extremely helpful to me to know because there is now still time for me to do something about those areas where some children still showed poor progress. (I can see this as being probably my fault entirely as I probably did not develop these problem areas fully enough. I can surmise that a reason might be that the first test showed several skill area weaknesses - so I may have tried to teach too much too fast. I hate to think of how many months it could have taken me to discover so many details. Maybe it would have been too late for some.)

5. The Theory: Children learn more when they evaluate their own performance than they do when the teacher evaluates it.

   Professor's Suggestion: For all activities which are assigned for independent work have the children evaluate their efforts and their product prior to turning the work in to the teacher.
   They can self evaluate with smile (☺) or frowns (☹), one word comments, or phrases and sentences. The teacher should help the children develop realistic self evaluation techniques by commenting upon the papers. Conferences may be necessary in extreme cases.

   Teacher's Implementation: We started in one subject area. To my surprise every child was extremely anxious to know how I evaluated what they had done - and almost demanded immediate feedback. I almost gave up. But then I noticed remarkable improvement. I expanded the idea so that now every child self evaluates every paper (not tests) prior to handing them to me. Five months into this procedure has resulted in a full 2/3 of the class caring more about their own evaluations than they do about mine.
   They have moved from very simple evaluations to comments such as - very good ideas, but the hand writing needs some improvement.

Each of our other innovations focuses on the theories of self selection, self pacing, and self correction as effective learning activities. Each also focuses upon the advantages of individualizing instruction.

REACTIONS:

At this time, our general reaction is that the program is very effective for the professor, the teacher, and the children. Every professor suggestion was in need of modification and rethinking. Specifically, our reactions are:

The professor: My course work on campus has become more relevant to what is going on in a classroom on a contingency basis. My theories are being supported but my suggestions for implementation are being adjusted. I can sell my ideas better because I can relate them to what happened yesterday morning instead of ten years ago. I find the teacher cooperative and willing to change - but only when she can feel free to modify and criticize. The project is worth every minute spent so far.

The teacher: As a classroom teacher, my everyday problem has been how can I help every individual in a class of twenty-nine or thirty to develop more closely to his potential. I have felt the frustration at seeing my most capable student idle while I tried to help the slower students - or the slower students would be frustrated while I tried to encourage the rest. I had some ideas but I didn't know how to implement them in a way that I could be sure of some success. I confronted the professor with my situation and he has visited my classroom regularly and offered many suggestions and ideas. I have appreciated them all because it has given me a real opportunity to do something for more children in the classroom. I have also had the opportunity of trying some exciting ideas that other people have tried and found successful. I do not see so many tears or frowns from frustration as I have before. I hope we can modify and add to our program as the need arises. The project has been worth every minute for me also.

The children: The children have reacted favorably for the most part. We have included their reactions (pro and con) in Appendix C. The children did not react to the skills testing and teaching - we figure they were not really aware of what was going on. However, they did react eagerly to the other innovations.

SUMMARY

Teachers and professors can work together to the mutual benefit of both. More efforts of the type explained in this paper might well eliminate the feeling in methods courses that what we are suggesting is unreal. The cooperative spirit which results from the effort strengthens the bonds between the university and the local schools.

Of importance is the fact that the teacher is now in a position to assist other teacher as they express an interest in what she is doing. She develops confidence by constant interaction with the professor. She works out every detail and then evaluates it.

Appendix A

Child	Reading Level	Con	Blds	Digh	Rhy Words	Vowels	Aud	Syll
1	6	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	G-G
2	6	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	F-F	-	F-G
3	5	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	G-G
4	5	G-G	G-G	F-G	G-G	F-G	-	F-G
5	4	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	G-G
6	4	F-G	P-P	P-P	G-G	G-G	-	-
7	4	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	G-G
8	4	G-G	P-G	P-G	G-G	F-G	-	-
9	4	G-G	F-G	G-G	G-G	F-G	-	-
10	3-2	G-G	G-G	P-G	G-G	G-G	-	-
11	3-2	G-G	G-G	F-G	G-G	F-G	-	-
12	3-2	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	F-G
13	3-2	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	G-G
14	3-2	G-G	P-G	P-G	G-G	P-G	-	-
15	3-2	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	F-G
16	3-1	G-G	P-G	P-G	P-G	P-P	-	-
17	3-1	F-G	G-G	F-G	G-G	G-G	-	-
18	3-1	G-G	F-F	P-G	G-G	F-G	G-G	-
19	3-1	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	G-G	-	F-G
20	2-2	G-G	F-G	F-G	F-G	G-G	F-F	-
21	2-1	G-G	F-F	P-G	G-G	F-G	G-G	-
22	2-1	G-G	G-G	G-G	F-G	F-F	G-G	-
23	2-1	G-G	G-G	P-G	P-G	G-G	G-G	-
24	1	F-G	P-F	P-G	P-G	P-G	G-G	-
25	1	G-G	P-G	P-G	G-G	P-G	F-G	-
26	P	P-P	P-P	P-P	P-P	P-P	P-G	-

By analyzing the strenghts and weaknesses of each child, and by adjusting instruction accordingly, marked progress can be demonstrated.

This chart shows several of the benefits of diagnostic teaching. Reading level column shows the results of the Botel Reading Inventory, Word Opposities section.

In the other columns are two letters (G-good, F-fair, and P-poor). The entry under each skill indicates the rating each child received on the second day of school. The second indicates his rating at the end of eight weeks. A "-" (dash) indicates no testing.

How would you like to be the teacher in a parent conference with child number 14 or 16 or 25?

Con=consonants
Blds=blends
Digh=digraphs
Rhy=rhyming
Aud=auditory discrimination
Syll=syllabication

Appendix B

		Week One			Week Two			Week Three			Week Four			Week Five		
Child	Level	P	C	F	P	C	F	P	C	F	P	C	F	P	C	F
1	6	19	29	30*	5	18	18*	13	22	27*	15	24	25*	14	24	26*
2	2-1	6	11	11*	1	9	9*	1	6	7*	0	6	6*	1	10	9
3	1	2	7	7*	1	7	7*	3	9	9*	5	15	15*	2	7	8*
4	3-2	14	22	22*	15	25	25*	19	29	30*	17	25	26*	12	19	20*
5	4	18	27	30*	15	23	24*	12	20	20*	11	18	19*	15	24	24*
6	3-1	6	16	15	8	19	21*	3	18	18*	5	11	15*	5	14	15*
7	Pp	2	6	5	7	11	11*	1	7	8*	8	12	13*	1	6	6*

P-practice test C-contract F-final test score *-Bonus

Appendix B shows the records of seven children for a five week period. The childs reading level is indicated and his pre-test (P) score, his contract (C) which includes his pre-test words plus new words, and his final (F) test score. Note the successes (*) of all children when paced appropriately.

Appendix C

Children's opinions of project. Reactions are in the ~~writing~~ written comments of the third grade children involved in the project described in this paper.

1. Spelling:

I like making my own spelling list because it is fun thinking up words.
It is fun and the teacher does not have to work as much.
I would like to make the spelling list because you can study the words you put on the chart. I like to pick my own words to learn because I can pick the word that is not too hard.
You don't have to study the same words all the time. You have a selection.
You can pick the easy words.
I like picking my words because I don't get the word wrong that I wrote.
I like making my own list because I learn what I want to. I don't have to do all the words.
If I want to learn a word all I have to do is put it on the list.
You can pick words that you think will help. I like making my own spelling list because when the teacher does it she has such easy words.
I like picking my words because you can pick one word and learn 19 and get a good letter. I like the idea because we can learn new words that we don't know how to spell. I like to see how many words I can think of to put on the list.
Some people put some words that are too hard on the chart.

2. Open Groups:

I like open groups because you can read a different kind of story.
I like the open reading groups because I get to read with different people.
Sometimes there are too many people. I like open groups because I can pick where I want to come to read. I like open groups because it is fun to listen to other stories. I like open reading groups because I like reading about two different things.
Sometimes it takes too much time.
The other groups might have a good story
I like to see if other people enjoy the story that we read.

3. Celebrity of the Week:

I like the celebrity because some day I might have my picture on the wall.
I like the celebrity because I like to get the nice cards.
I like it because I was a celebrity.
I like it because people write about me.
It's nice writing letters.
I like to have a celebrity of the week because I can find things about people.
You can find if people like you.
When it comes my turn to be the celebrity I can see what kind of good things there are about me.
I like it because the person gets a chance to be good.
If you're new you get to know everybody.
I like the celebrity of the week because you don't need a stamp.
It makes me feel good when somebody writes something nice about me.

Appendix C (continued)

4. Self Evaluation:

I think it is helpful. It does no harm.
I write my opinions on my papers because then I know what my grades would probably be.
It helps me learn.
I think we should check our own papers so you will know what our opinions are.
I think it is a good idea for us to check our work because we can show what we think about our papers.
It's hard for me to tell if 5 wrong is satisfactory.
I think its a good idea because right away we know how many we got right.
I like to check my work because after that I will know if I need to improve it or not. I would also know the grade I should get on my report card.
I like self evaluation because you can find out the things you do not know so that you can learn it.
I think self evaluation is a good idea. I did not do this in second or first grade so I sometimes have trouble but I like to do it.